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RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAH #1389 3551216
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 211216Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9927
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3143
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0958
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0832
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1406
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2027
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001389

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN
AID/W FOR EE/AA (WALLIN)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: SUPREME COUNCIL OFFERS TO HOST USAID'S
INTERNET ACCESS AND TRAINING PROGRAM

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a very positive development on December 13, representatives of the Supreme Council for Science and Technology (SCST) verbally agreed to a proposal for cooperation with the USAID-funded Internet Access and Training Program (IATP). As a first step, the project would establish an Internet center in Ashgabat on the premises of the SCST. Additional pilot centers in Dashoguz and Turkmenbashi cities are planned within three months of concluding an agreement. From these centers, USAID's implementing partner, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), and the SCST will promote the use of new technologies for education, science, and research in Turkmenistan through a variety of approaches. END SUMMARY.

STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

¶3. (U) IREX previously had identified the Supreme Council for Science and Technology as a potential partner but had been unable to establish official relations with this influential and recently empowered entity. As an outcome of USAID's first official meeting with representatives of the Supreme Council on October 17, the Supreme Council agreed to host a presentation by IREX on potential new opportunities for cooperation.

¶4. (U) On December 5, visiting IREX officials made an introductory presentation to an audience of over 30 representatives from the SCST, the Mejlis (Parliament) and the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights. (NOTE: These three bodies seem to be emerging as the Berdimuhamedov-empowered centers for reform. END NOTE.) In addition, state television crews were on hand to film the beginning of the event. Although the Deputy Chairwoman of the Supreme Council, following the presentation, said she had expected greater detail on IREX's capabilities, she asked IREX to submit a proposal for cooperation.

¶5. (U) In the follow-up meeting on December 13, the Supreme Council agreed to IREX's proposal to establish an Internet center in Ashgabat and offered space for this center on its premises. The

proposal also included an offer to establish additional pilot centers in Dashoguz and Turkmenbashi cities within three months of concluding a formal agreement. Each center will be equipped with five computers and related equipment and staffed by a qualified expert in the field of technology education. To build on the pilot effort, IREX and the SCST will continue to explore new ways to use technology for education, science, and research in Turkmenistan.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: President Berdimuhamedov has repeatedly expressed a desire to increase Internet access and to introduce international standards across the education, science, and health sectors. The Supreme Council, which fell under Berdimuhamedov's former portfolio as Deputy Chairman for Health, Education, Science and Technology, has been tasked by the president with implementing important parts of these objectives. To this end, the SCST already oversees the EU-funded NATO Virtual Silk Highway program, which has established a network of 53 scientific and research institutions with high-speed internet access. The USG can contribute to this goal by working with bodies like the Supreme Council to help ensure that new technologies like the Internet are not only accessible in Turkmenistan, but also that citizens and government alike are able to take full advantage of such tools. This agreement is an important step toward greater cooperation with this influential entity. If we are serious about our policy of desiring to expand the information space in Turkmenistan, we need to put our money where our mouth is. END COMMENT.

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